

# Taking Care of Mom

Caring for your newborn can easily take up all your time and energy, but it's important not to forget about your own body. If you take good care of yourself, you'll have the energy you need to care for your baby.

In this part of the program, we'll talk about physical and emotional challenges for new moms and how to deal with them. Understanding these issues and asking for help when you need it can make these early days with your baby less stressful and more enjoyable.

*"How does it feel to you? Comfortable?"*

Breastfeeding not only helps you and your baby bond, but it's also one of the most important things you can do for their health.

*"Breast milk is the optimal nutrition for your baby. First of all, it's free, but it's also hypoallergenic so its least likely for your baby to be allergic to. It has numerous health benefits from preventing diabetes, certain types of cancer and even prevention of obesity."*

But sometimes it can be challenging, especially at first.

*"I had expectations that the baby would want to nurse every 2 to 3 hours but then I soon learned that my baby wanted to nurse every hour and that was really hard."*

*"Breastfeeding is not as natural as you might think. The mom has the milk, the baby knows how to suck, you would think it all happens the way it's supposed to but it's kind of like learning how to ride a bike or drive a car you really need to learn how to do it."*

While breastfeeding comes easily to some women, others may struggle. But the effort is worth it, so don't give up! One of the challenges some moms experience is engorgement: when the typical fullness felt in the breasts becomes hard and painful. The condition, which may develop during the 3rd to 5th day after childbirth, sometimes involves a low-grade fever. It can lead to plugged milk ducts or infection.

To prevent it: Breastfeed often, especially on the affected side; Massage the breast; Use cold compresses; And work on the baby's latch so that their mouth covers both the nipple and the skin surrounding it.

*"If mom is uncomfortable then it probably means the baby is not latched on deeply enough or maybe using the tongue inappropriately in the mouth. So, pain is always a signal that it needs to be evaluated. Some moms will have a little bit of nipple tenderness in the first few days just because they're not used to this baby feeding frequently, but it shouldn't be intensely painful. Some moms will also notice that just as the baby starts to latch a little bit of pulling and tugging and it makes it a little bit uncomfortable, but it should only last for the first 10, 15, maybe 20 seconds. If it's not getting better after that then the baby needs to be taken back off and re-latched again until mom can do that comfortably."*

Getting a good latch and finding a comfortable feeding position should help with soreness. You can help chapped nipples heal by rubbing on some breast milk and allowing it to air dry. Or try a small amount of lanolin ointment on the nipple, which won't hurt your baby. Another possible challenge is mastitis, or breast infection. It's a soreness or lump in the breast accompanied by a fever or flu-like symptoms such as low energy, achiness and nausea. It usually affects just one breast. If you experience mastitis symptoms, see your doctor as soon as possible.

*"We also offer breastfeeding support for mamas who are breastfeeding, we offer free classes."*

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For help with any breastfeeding challenges, get in touch with a lactation consultant.

*“The most important thing if you’re having trouble and you’re frustrated is to get help early.”*

Some moms like learning from other women in breastfeeding support groups. Your hospital or pediatrician can refer you to resources in your area.

Pregnancy and childbirth transform your body. As you heal there may be some pain and discomfort. Be patient. If you had an episiotomy: a small surgical incision made during a vaginal delivery to enlarge the birth opening, it may hurt for a few weeks, especially when you walk or sit.

*“And you have a small tear here that looks very good. It’s intact, meaning that the sutures are intact. And those are dissolvable sutures. Nothing has to be removed. To care for it you want to keep the perineum as clean as possible. Each time you’re using the bathroom, you’re rinsing off with warm water. You’re also using topical anesthetics which helps. You’re also using little witch-hazel pads, which is very soothing to the area. And you can also use Sitz Baths.”*

A sitz bath is a warm, shallow bath used for healing and cleansing. If you feel you need a pain reliever, or a stool softener talk with your doctor. Be prepared to use menstrual pads for a while.

*“It’s normal to have a bloody vaginal discharge after delivery. This lasts about 4 to 6 weeks and is called lochia. It gradually goes away on its own.”*

If you had a C-section, it can take 4 to 6 weeks to recover.

*“You’re going to feel some pain at the incision as well as much more fatigue than you’re used to as your body tries to heal. You should feel comfortable going ahead and taking the pain medications when you need it. While you’re using the pain medications you shouldn’t drive, because the pain medications can make you tired.”*

After a C-section, watch for signs of possible infection: If the incision is red, swollen, or leaking discharge; A fever higher than 100.4 degrees; Increasing pain around the incision; Or uncontrolled bleeding. Pregnancy and especially, having a c-section increase the risk for deep vein thrombosis or DVT - a blood clot that forms in a deep vein, typically in the legs. The condition can be life threatening if not treated.

*“Should you develop leg-swelling, pain that is persistent, you have swelling around your ankles or increased warmth of your leg, then seek medical attention. Don’t be afraid to let your physician know that something is not right with your leg.”*

When breastfeeding, use a position that doesn’t put pressure on the incision. Also, get help from family or friends with any lifting around the house so you can recover and heal from the surgery. To help strengthen pelvic floor muscles, daily Kegel exercises are often recommended, especially if you’ve had a vaginal delivery. To find the pelvic floor muscle, when you go to the bathroom, try cutting off urination in midstream. The muscle you use to do that is the same muscle you should squeeze, or tighten, during Kegels. Do not squeeze your abdomen, legs, or buttocks.

*“It’s basically tightening the muscles and releasing. We’re just trying to get back the vaginal tone that may have been lost through pregnancy and through birth.”*

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Regaining strength in your pelvic muscles can make the resumption of sex more enjoyable. Of course, it's understandable if sex is the last thing on your mind right now. Many healthcare providers recommend waiting 4 to 6 weeks after delivery. Some women need more time, while others are ready sooner. The important thing is that you and your partner communicate. And once you do resume sex, keep in mind that you can get pregnant again, even if you're breastfeeding.

You may find yourself on an emotional roller coaster after having your baby. That's because of the dramatic hormonal changes going on in your body. These mood swings are called baby blues.

*"It's very normal to have a condition called the baby blues in the first few days or weeks after having baby. What's happening is that your hormones are moving in different directions and so you can have mood swings where you're happy one minute and then sad the next. Luckily, this goes away very quickly for most women."*

The symptoms typically go away within a few weeks and don't require treatment. But in some cases, they can be much more serious, and signs of what's known as postpartum depression. Symptoms include Intense irritability and anger; Overwhelming fatigue; Lack of joy in life; Inability to bond with your baby; Withdrawal from family and friends; And thoughts of harming yourself or your baby.

*"Postpartum depression is a series of changes in a woman's behavior, and this can happen anytime up to a year following delivery. It's really important to seek medical help and most women benefit from either professional counseling or medication or both."*

All new moms can develop postpartum depression, but some are at greater risk including: those with a history of loss, depression, or other mental illness. Support from family and friends, along with exercise and plenty of rest can help. Talking to other moms in a support group, and knowing they're not alone, can also make a difference.

Healthy eating after childbirth is important for both you and your baby. You need enough energy to take care of your baby, and a good diet gives you the nutrients you need to heal and feel better. Breastfeeding moms need plenty of fluids, six to ten glasses a day, so you don't get dehydrated.

Foods to put on your grocery list include Fish such as salmon; Low-fat dairy products; Eggs; Lean meats; Beans; Brown rice; Whole wheat bread, pasta, and cereals; Fruit; And leafy greens. Don't be concerned about going on a weight-loss diet while you're breastfeeding. You need an additional 500 calories a day just to feed your baby. Plus, nursing burns calories so you'll safely lose 4 to 5 pounds a month just from breastfeeding. Be patient with your weight loss. Remember, you put on 20-25 pounds during your pregnancy and losing it may take up to a year. Regular exercise can help.

*"We encourage women to start walking shortly after childbirth. It's important that they don't overdo it in the initial stages and build up to physical activity."*

*"There's a couple things that people can do when they're at home that they might not really think is exercise. Is literally walking back and forth to their car. Putting their baby into their bucket seat. The baby can weight 8-10 pounds, plus the bucket seat's pretty heavy. So, carrying a bucket seat up the stairs. Walking lunges. Walking squats. Heel raises while you're feeding your baby. Putting groceries away. These are very basic things that people can do. Although you're tired, these are things that you have to do anyway."*

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With your doctor's okay, you can do simple floor exercises at home to tone your body. Work up to a mom and baby yoga class or a more rigorous workout class. It's a great way to get in shape, spend time with your baby and meet other new moms.